

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The Theatre

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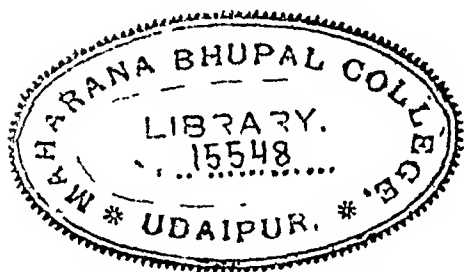
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NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The Theatre



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THE BODLEY HEAD · LONDON

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AUGUST 1919 saw Stratford-on-Avon invaded by delegates of theatrical organisations, by actors, managers and producers, by educationalists and social workers. They were all arriving for the first British Theatre Conference. This meeting had been arranged by the British Drama League, a body which had been publicly launched only that year—though its nucleus had been a drama-group run by the Workers Educational Association in a war-factory.

The hopes which animated the Conference found utterance in the following resolutions :—

1. That this Conference urges the importance of establishing a National Theatre policy adequate to the needs of the people, and a Faculty of Theatre at the Universities of the country, with the necessary Colleges.

2. That this Conference pledges itself to promote and assist collective and individual efforts in the development of Acting, Drama, and the Theatre as forces in the life of the Nation.

Britain claims the greatest theatre-tradition in the world ; but this was the first time the interested bodies and individuals had got together in an organised way to evaluate the tradition and find out what had happened to it. Their findings were not flattering to our national pride. The resolutions stated flatly that the country had no policy adequate to the cultural needs of the people and that the Theatre played no serious part in the life of the nation. The Theatre, they pointed out, had become isolated, remote from that life. What was going to be done about it ?

How the isolation had come about is a long story. The 1919 Conference faced its consequences, and that is the point where the effort to base the Theatre again broadly in the

national life begins. The delegates went out to put the resolutions into action, and the long struggle was opened.

By 1945 there had come State recognition of the claims of the Theatre, with financial subsidy, and a general increase of municipal and regional activity in drama. In many ways, unknown in 1919, drama was linked with the life of the people. However incomplete and unsatisfactory much of the situation might still be, on a broad view we could not mistake the very considerable change which had come about—a change which on the whole was along the lines of action put forward by the 1919 resolutions.

How had this change come about? How much of it was the result of conscious work by groups and individuals such as those making up the 1919 Conference, and how much of it the result of general pressures of history? Perhaps the simplest way to answer those questions is to have a look at the sort of people who made up the Conference—people who, taken together in their varying jobs and functions, make up the complicated world of the Theatre. After all, any changes in that world must be conditioned by the way it works and holds together. The changes must arrive out of new combinations and directions of the indispensable factors.

For the purpose of a roll-call it doesn't matter at which end we start. So let us start with the Playwright, and work from him and his product through the whole mechanism needed to get a play on to the stage. After that we can turn to the consideration of historical pressures and conscious efforts of reorganisation; we shall have secure at the back of our minds the concrete factors out of which the larger movements are composed, the actually available elements on which any advances must be based.

I. THE INGREDIENTS.

THE PLAYWRIGHT is a lone individual with an idea, the technical capacity to translate that idea into dramatic form, and enough salesmanship-organisation (a euphuism we shall explore in due time) to persuade someone to back financially the production of his play. I call him a lone individual because it is extremely rare to find a playwright working with a Theatre Company *as* a playwright.

In Britain theatrical activity is noisily centralised in the West End of London. A playwright aiming at commercial success is pretty sure to turn with his play to the West End, and his heart will sink to the extent to which he correctly estimates the difficulties confronting him. To run a London Theatre is an expensive business, and no manager is going to take avoidable risks with the box-office. A new name is a heavy disadvantage for the playwright. The West End Theatre, over the past twenty years, shows a lamentably low percentage of new playwrights, either in the straight or musical fields.

However, if merit, persistence and salesmanship in the needed proportions succeed, the play will appear in central London; and if it succeeds, the playwright joins the small band of the elect. The cash-returns for a good London run are high. Usually the author is paid on a sliding scale of percentages on box-office takings. Before 1939 this averaged out at between £100 and £200 a week.

Also, as the connection between West End managements and the controlling bodies of most provincial theatres is very close, a West End play stands an excellent chance of a long tour in the country, profitable to the playwright.

But what if salesmanship fails in the West End? Then the playwright may turn to the Repertory Theatres. The Repertory Movement began early in the century in the form

of Playwrights' Theatres, looking for new plays and seeking to build up groups of writers closely attached to the day-to-day stage-work. As the movement extended, however, the theatres had to abandon high ideals and set themselves to solve the problem of putting on as many plays as possible in a minimum of time. Some Repertories, indeed, under great difficulties, stuck to good plays and try to find new ones, but in the main cash-needs involve a quick turn-over in plays. And that means a very small return for the authors.

Finally, there is the amateur field. The leading amateur theatres are the Little Theatres, which own their own premises. These are few in number, with generally high standards. Often they have given first productions to notable plays. Thus, the West End took over Peter Ustinov's *The Banbury Nose* from the Newcastle People's Theatre. Playwright's royalties from amateurs are small : from five shillings to two guineas a performance. But Little Theatres often set the pace for thousands of amateur groups all over the country ; and a play like Priestley's *They Came to a City* has been played incessantly by amateurs and will go on being played for years. For new plays, however, a large percentage of Dramatic Societies show no interest or capacity ; their repertory depends on the release of the amateur rights of West End successes.

Playwrights, then, work for a very uncertain market. A play, which may take from a month to several years to write, has no guarantee, even if it is of high merit, of acceptance for the stage. And there is nowhere for the writer to turn for training in this very technical type of work. He must depend on hard work, luck, or inspiration. But at least perhaps he need not do his own marketing. There are many literary and dramatic agencies, which, if they like a manuscript play, will try to place it for a royalty-percentage. They draw up contracts and watch the playwright's business interests during the run. Further, the Society of Authors and British League of Dramatists advise and watch over contracts

for members. Trade Unions in many ways without the name, they have done much to establish the economic rights of authorship.

But, from a broad view, there are a great many reasons why playwrights should have applauded the 1919 resolutions.

Now, from the man with the idea to the man with the money. *The Theatre Manager* is responsible for the whole running of the show, financial and administrative. In the West End he usually represents a Company, of Limited or Private Liability, or a Partnership. The capital comes from individuals, or more often, from a Syndicate. Frequently the money comes, not from people interested in the theatre but from those who just want a good investment with quick returns. The Manager is expected to estimate how much money will be required, and apportion percentages of investment, liability and profit. The whole thing has much the air of a gamble.

Next the manager deals with the persons necessary for the production. The playwright gets a good sum in advance on confirmation of contract. A producer is engaged, on contract, for a fair-sized fee (averaging round £300) or a smaller sum plus a percentage of weekly takings during the run. He then, probably with the playwright, selects a designer for stage-decor, who gets a fee varying considerably according to the difficulties of the work and his personal prestige.

Then comes the cast. The producer, in consultation with the manager, does the engaging. Actors are generally taken on individually for a single production; but occasionally a leading artist has a contract with a management for a specified length of time. It is very rare indeed to find a company of actors working as a group for a management. If however the management has some stars under contract, the play chosen will be one that suits their line of talent. For the main body of actors the producer applies to the Agencies, who draw a *commission* on the salary of artists for whom they find a job; and this on the whole seems to be a profitable method of working—for the Agent.

Both Theatrical Employers and Dramatic Agencies are bound by Act of Parliament and Local Government Regulations to be registered before going into business. And a management (as the rule of the Actors' Trade Union, Equity, insists) must deposit two weeks salary for every actor with the Union, against possible breakdown of the enterprise. These regulations have been gained out of the long struggle to protect artists against unscrupulous treatment.

The scale of pay for the cast varies a great deal ; but one thing is certain, the salaries will form a big item in the West End budget. £500 is perhaps an average weekly figure.

Technical staff, for stage-lighting, stage-management, wardrobe, and so on, are engaged with the cast. Very few managements retain a permanent staff of technicians. Play-settings are built normally by outside contractors, as our theatres almost without exception lack their own workshops.

Finally, the management has to find a theatre ; and this is probably the biggest headache of the lot. Even when a theatre is found, the rent is sure to be a very heavy item. Even taking into account that rent usually covers the engagement of firemen, doorkeepers, ushers and cleaners, London rents are extremely high. On signing a contract with the theatre-owners a large deposit is paid.

Now comes publicity through press and bill-posting. Most managements employ a Publicity Manager, but also use agencies. Publicity uniformly stresses the players rather than the play ; and after all the years of propaganda put into making the public primarily interested in star-personalities, it is no use complaining that they won't go to a play without the billing of a star or two.

As the West End and the big provincial theatres are getting more and more closely connected, many provincial managers simply work by booking a London production lock-stock-and-barrel. They are little more than Resident Managers for London Companies. Some, however, reserve part of the season

for their own companies ; but these independents are a declining band.

All managements outside the West End are not drawn into this stereotyping net. In Municipal and Repertory theatres more variety is possible. Here the manager generally does the whole job, from selecting the play to engaging the cast ; but his sphere of action is comparatively small. He is held down by lack of money, and such money as he can get often comes out of local funds and donations. He generally has his own premises—though some Repertories work as travelling companies, playing outside the commercial circuits or fitting into the interstices of the big commercial tours.

Last comes the amateur movement, where management is apt to have a fluctuating character. Only in the few cases where a group has gained a theatre of its own—has become a Little Theatre—does one find a stable division of labour. Then the position approximates to that in some Repertories, though the premises are built and maintained by donations, membership-fees, and voluntary work as well as proceeds from shows. The smaller dramatic societies search for stages in their localities, which can be turned into a theatre for a night or a week : school halls, town halls, church halls, institutes. Many amateur groups solve their financial problems by inviting charity-organisations to sponsor their plays, meet all expenses and take all profits ; and this procedure has its merits fiercely argued out throughout the movement. Altogether, management among amateurs has so far succeeded in begetting more problems than solutions.

A glance then at managements, commercial and amateur, suggests that though there may be many of the first type who are abundantly satisfied, the state of things is such as to perturb anyone concerned with the national health of the Theatre. The situation is increasingly weighted on the side of big-money and unintelligent box-office appeal. The Theatrical Managers Association indeed seems perfectly well aware of its isolated position ; it alone of all the elements making up the British

stage is anxious to keep things as they are. Thus, in the early thirties it frowned effectively on an attempt to set up a central organisation for the Repertories, which could have dealt with the problems of raising artistic and economic standards in those theatres ; in the early 'forties it expressed more than lack of interest in the Dartington Hall inquiry into the position of our stage ; and it refused to co-operate in the British Theatre Conference of 1948.

II. BUILDINGS.

THEATRE BUILDINGS come into our survey as an important factor in making London productions so expensive. The high costs of theatre-space, by thus strengthening the need for big-money in production, are a basic obstruction in the way of change, and need some closer attention.

There are some 30 to 40 theatres open at any given time in London's West End. Most are owned by private persons or by big land-holding organisations, the banks or the Crown. These ground-landlords do not participate in productions or the running of the theatres. The Controllers are those persons or bodies which have the buildings on a long lease. They rarely act as producing managements. The rule, however, is for them to sub-let to another management for a specific relatively short period. To complicate matters, there often intrudes an intermediate lessee who rents the theatre for a fairly long time, does not produce, but sub-sub-lets to a producing management.

This castle-of-cards system of rake-offs is one reason for the close printing common in bills advertising shows :

THE PRETTY THEATRE

London.

Box Office : 2—11

Proprietors : MR. X and MR. Y. Lessees : The O Theatres Ltd.

Licensee : MR. O.

EASY PLAYS LTD.

by arrangement with Mr. O.

present

THE STORY OF THIS THAT AND THE OTHER.

The control and letting of the bricks-and-mortar needed for drama provide the one sure way of making money in the big entertainments industry ; and so the power and the property have fallen mainly into the hands of a few large corporations.

The result is a race of all producing managements to get into close association with the theatre-controllers. Otherwise they will have much difficulty in finding a theatre at all. The resulting financial tie-ups are highly involved ; and only a small handful of interested people can really know the full ramifications. But the problems which strike any independent management which seeks a lease of a West End theatre are sufficient indication of the closed ring. A glance at theatre-bills will show a small number of names indefinitely repeated ; the order varies, but the total effect is the same.

If we look at the large provincial theatres, we meet the same situation in a slightly relaxed form. A few extra names appear among the list of controllers ; but working arrangements seem so closely dovetailed that to all intents and purposes there might just as well be one organisation in charge of the major British theatres. A comparison with the monopolistic trends on both the producing and distributing sides of the film-industry would no doubt be premature ; but the general direction of concentration cannot be missed.

On the positive side it has led to a certain simplification of production-planning. Thus, a play can be assured of a steadier run and wider showing. But as the planning is based almost entirely on box-office possibilities, there is the danger of artistic timidity and stereotyping in production and choice of play. The penetration of new ideas into the system or the development of a wide variety of productions is made increasingly difficult.

In smaller theatres the method of control varies widely. Individuals, Trust Funds, Local Authorities, participate in running Municipal, Repertory and Little Theatres. Here, centralisation of control does not operate (except in so far as it affects public opinion in its attitude to plays and so on) ; and there is room for a variety of ideas and techniques. But the smallness of resources and the lack of any common front for defence and exchange of ideas militate against their effective development.

As for the Buildings themselves, there is one factor shared by all theatres, big or small, in Britain ; and that is that they are inadequate to carry out their function. The main reason seems to be that they are designed primarily, not to house plays, but to 'hold money.' The auditorium is the only feature to which full attention is paid ; and the key problem is to make it as large and cramful of seats as possible. No one will deny that it is important to have the spectators comfortably seated ; but the architectural issues do not halt there, and in fact they seldom even get so far—the packing of money leads to very little consideration of the audience's comfort at all. The story goes that one architect, recently designing a theatre-building, omitted the BOX-OFFICE altogether. His forgetfulness may have shaken the theatre-controllers more than somewhat, but was perhaps a hopeful sign for the future.

Again, the crushing of foyers, refreshment-rooms and cloak-rooms into a narrow space is hardly conducive to a carefree state of mind in any audience.

Behind the footlights, stages are usually large, with adequate playing-space , but rarely indeed is the general structure and planning off the boards at all satisfactory. Wing-space is so commonly disregarded that the exits and entrances of players become difficult operations. Stage-managers and stage-hands are at a great disadvantage in trying to work at a high rate of speed and efficiency, when they are given scanty space for the storage of sets, furniture, and properties. The fight between cast and technicians for the few miserable feet of wing-space is a continual source of interruption and trouble. In the strain of performance everyone blames the nearest person for any cluttering-up : which is bad for the smooth teamwork essential to a good production.

The lighting equipment of almost all theatres is very backward, quite incapable of carrying a big production. Extra floods, spotlights etc., have to be hired and laboriously fitted up by the electrician and his staff.

When you reach the back, you find that very little consideration (sometimes none at all) is given to the comfort, or even health, of the artists. Dressing-rooms are often difficult to get at from the stage, and the cast keep on running up and down narrow draughty stairs. Washing facilities are woefully insufficient. Several people often have to share a small room. The lavatory situation is sometimes a disgrace. Not all theatre-buildings, it is true, suffer from every one of these drawbacks ; but there are only a handful which can claim to get away with less than fifty per cent.

The smaller theatres suffer from the same disadvantages but they have at least the excuse of small money-resources. Among amateurs converted buildings are frequent, and are seldom satisfactory, since theatres need a special architectural treatment from the outset and the patching-up of other type of building is hardly likely to meet the requirements. However in some cases, clearly-defined financial limits and expert planning have led to interesting and efficient experiments.

Finally, there is no established course on theatre-architecture in Britain, although the problems of acoustics, sight-line, technical equipment demand the most expert knowledge.

III. PRODUCER AND TECHNICIANS.

AND NOW, having looked at Playwright, Manager and Buildings, let us consider more fully the other persons who must co-operate artistically and technically to get the play actually on to the stage. First, *the Producer*, the key-man from the stage viewpoint. Some managements have producers on long contract ; but mostly they take a producer on only for one play, and so the producer, like most people connected with stage-work, is a free-lance.

His role in a play is ubiquitous and hard to define. For a while the film-term Director invaded the theatre, but it now seems to have faded out, and the more active term Producer holds its own. However he conceives his function, he must be a technician who knows the stage intimately and can obtain the desired effect of lighting, setting, grouping, movement, music, and all the other hundred-and-one tricks of illusion and pattern that make up a play in action. He must be enough of an actor to draw out of his cast all they can give, and yet not ask the impossible. He must be something of an historian of the theatre, something of a literary man, trained to grasp the fundamentals of a play, able to project the entire form of the play almost from the moment of reading the script. And much more.

Since then production is a job which calls on so many faculties and technical comprehensions, we would expect to find a number of training schools for producers. All we find is that in some dramatic schools there are courses in production and up to 1939 the London Theatre Studio took the matter seriously. So almost all producers in Britain have come from the experimental theatres or from the ranks of the acting profession.

Like the playwright, the producer has to build up his own experience and then find some way of selling his talent to a

manager. After several years of work in specialised theatres or a Repertory, he may graduate into a big theatre, by luck or extreme persistence. A flop then, perhaps through circumstances for which he is not at all responsible, will put him right out of the field or make years more of weary persistence necessary before he gets another trial. Further, this haphazard method of getting or giving chances inevitably puts a premium on 'knowing the right people,' on social charm and on the correct contacts.

The West End is the producer's goal because it is the gateway to reputation and to high rates—anything between £150 to £300 or more for a three-act play. Money is an important factor in a profession where employment is very uncertain and spasmodic. Besides, the keen producer will want to try his hand in the theatres which are best equipped; and those are in the West End.

But his openings are more likely to lie in the smaller theatres, especially Repertory, where he can try out new ideas and gain training in the use of limited resources. Here payment is on a low scale, so that few producers will stay in Repertory once they get a chance to leave. Still, some talented persons do stay because of the freedom for experimentation and the possibilities of reaching new audiences. Among amateurs, the producer is rarely paid; but the Little Theatres often give wide scope and have nurtured some producers of note.

Stage Designers sometimes start as individual artists with no direct connection with the theatre, who are called in to work with an expert stage-technician; sometimes they train as designers while doing other jobs on a stage-staff. The work needs thorough knowledge of stage conditions, and the designer must know the play closely, must understand the producer's angle of interpretation, must work within the financial limits set by the management, must take into consideration the size of the stage, the angles from which the audience will see the play, the facilities for putting-up or striking the sets, and other practical issues. Even when a

non-theatrical artist is engaged to design sets and costumes, he will find that he knows a lot more when the dress-rehearsal takes place than he did when making his first rough sketches.

Yet the facilities for the training of designers are practically non-existent in Britain. The designer is in the same position as the producer. He must learn his job by hook-and-crook and must hover round the West End for the rewards, and if he wants some intelligent experimentation, with design integrated in the whole production, he must go to one of the better small-theatres.

Technicians are generally in much the same boat. The main burden of carrying out any production falls on the Stage-manager, who is responsible for everything behind the foot-lights. As soon as work starts on a play, he is on the job. He is the eyes, ears and hands of the producer, noting down the moves of every actor, timing the length of scenes, checking the changes of scenery, synchronising light cues with the action, supervising property-man and prompter, and at once settling all the myriad little problems that arise in production. Large companies sometimes split the function and add a stage-director, who is the main liaison with producer.

The split-second initiative needed in a good stage-manager may often mean the difference between success or failure for a play. Yet here again training facilities are negligible. Dramatic schools have a few courses on stage-management; but almost all leading technicians in the theatre have learned their jobs from the bottom upwards. Their training has consisted of hard work and hard knocks. And the same applies to the Electrician, despite the complex set of tricks he needs to acquire, and to the Assistant Stage-manager, who does innumerable odd jobs for the stage-manager proper. The Assistant is often a small-part actor or understudy Stage-hands, who move scenery and do all sorts of backstage tasks, are made up of youngsters hoping to work up into more specialised roles or casuals adding a few shillings to other sources of income.

Luck and persistence are again the determining factors in the careers of stage-technicians. There is no organisation for training or selection, but there is a powerful Trade Union to protect the economic rights of those who have achieved stage-employment—the National Association of Theatrical and Kine Employees (NATKE). The existence of this Union has meant a growing recognition of the status and responsibility of the technician. But the problem of training has so far been ignored.

IV. ACTORS.

BUT SO FAR we have omitted the one set of theatre-personalities most easily identified by the public, the actors and actresses. They are certainly the ones in the public eye, but that does not mean that the public sees more than a very small part of their work. The sharp light of glamour, by cutting out background and basis, ends by giving a false idea of what constitutes an actor at all.

There is a formidable list of qualifications to be mastered before an actor is fully prepared to go on the stage. He must be able to speak clearly and effectively, to make up for brilliant lighting, to overcome all awkwardness of body and mind in front of a mass of people, to study a character quite unlike his own and portray it faithfully, to understand something of the theatre's history and the background of the play in which he is cast, and to have at least a smattering of a large number of other technical matters.

No one is born with this specialised knowledge, so how is it obtained? There are several dramatic schools, which aim at turning out students trained for acting; but not one of them has an organised relation to any theatre (except that of the Old Vic). The student who finishes his course is not guaranteed a position in any theatre; he is just one more individual intruding on the general field of stage (un) employment. It is not even as if training at a school was expected or wanted as a prerequisite to a stage-career. Probably the most common procedure is to begin as an amateur, move into Repertory, and then break (if successful) into the West End.

Student or ex-amateur, the aspirant gets himself registered on the books of a dramatic agency. He agrees to pay the agent his whole first week's salary and a percentage (usually 10%) on the following weeks; and the agent proceeds to keep his

eye on all plans being made by producing managements and tries to sell the talents of such of his clients as he thinks best vendible. Or the producer sends round to ask the agent if he can supply someone young, not too tall, suitable to team up with Mr. X as second juvenile lead ; a character-actor able to do a Lancashire pub-keeper , or a small-part actor who can also sing in tune. Such requests often involve a study by all concerned of *Spotlight*, a huge well-produced and entertaining directory of artists with photographs, qualifications, and experience neatly included.

If the actor seems a possible, he gets an audition before the producer (sometimes also manager and playwright). Auditions are not generally arranged in such a way as to put the artist at his ease. He may be asked to read a scene from a play without knowing anything about the plot or the character he reads, and to work with someone he has never met before, under cold eyes, in a cramped space. If he survives this test, and his agent gets the contract fixed, covering rate of pay, number of performances, rights and duties of both sides from the first day to the last of the contract's term. (With an artist of any standing the contract will exhaustively cover such important matters as the relative height in inches that his name is to have in advertisements).

Rehearsals average up to three weeks. A day extends roughly from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. with a lunch-break—though there is no time-limit, and in the last few days all hands may be on deck from early morning to midnight or later. The management is obliged to pay, at a cut rate, the rank-and-file actors and technicians ; but high-salaried stars are paid only from the start of the run.

During the run, there are usually eight performances a week (six evenings and two matinees). While under contract, the artist must not undertake other work without written permission. Sometimes he is allowed to broadcast or act in a film as long as acknowledgment is made in advertising—the notorious 'by permission of . . .' Contracts cover a specific

run, with either side able to break them on giving two weeks notice in writing. When the run is over, the actor most likely is out of work with the old problems of somehow attracting attention and getting into another show.

More variety of contract rules in Repertory. Some actors are engaged for a whole season, though the cancellation clause still operates ; others come in for a single play or to fill a gap for a while. As so many actors use Repertory as a stepping-stone to London, the management and players must be ready for a quick turn-round in parts.

Many Repertories give a new play each week and thus demand very heavy work from the actors. Versatility, quick learning powers, and immense reserves of energy become the main qualifications. A typical Repertory week goes like this : Twice-nightly performances of Play A, with rehearsals during the day of Play B ; Sunday and Monday divided between dismantling Play A and setting the stage for Play B ; first night of Play B on Monday ; rehearsal of Play C starting on Tuesday.

Such a system leads to a great deal of wastage, as concentrated work at this pitch of intensity sooner or later wrecks any physique. The actor either feels that he is using Repertory as a platform to jump into some other type of theatre, or he relies on tricks of stage-technique, gagging and generalised type-playing, in order to save calling on too much mental and physical energy. Neither alternative leads to high artistic standards. Yet, despite these extremes drawbacks, Repertory has its virtues : varied experience, some possibility of working in a stable group over a fairly long period, intimate knowledge of one theatre and its characteristics, a long term policy of production and method. Not that any of these attractions can end by meaning much to an exhausted mind and body. With amateurs the contract disappears, and activity is necessarily limited to one locality. Some groups play with a practically permanent cast ; others, for one reason or another, change their players for every production. In the best of them,

auditioning is very careful and members get parts only after a long period of study and training, which is provided partly by the society and partly by attendance at evening classes. But unfortunately too many amateurs just want to 'go on the stage,' and have no conception that acting is a highly skilled profession; they rely on 'experience' to give the training.

The amateur stage can be a stepping-off ground to commercial engagements as the talent-scouts of agencies and managements visit the productions of the best amateur societies and at times sign on their most promising players. Further, some amateur groups work closely with their local Repertory, and fill out the cast in walking-on parts—another way of getting a foot in the commercial theatre.

Like the technicians, the actor, once on the stage, finds a powerful organisation ready to fight for his economic interests, British Actors Equity Association. Equity covers the whole field of wages and conditions, and has struggled for years for Standard Contracts which are now accepted by most big managements. In London its position is so strong that no actor or actress, of any status, can obtain a position without being a member, and this ensures that there can be no undercutting of salaries.

Things are not so well covered in the provinces, though Equity has for some time been working for regularising conditions all over the country. The importance of Equity is evident when we realise that actors are still classified, from certain legal aspects, as Casual Workers—a slight, but only a slight, advance on the Elizabethan classification as Vagabonds.

Significantly, Equity, which emerged purely to deal with economic standards, has recently turned its attention to the artistic sphere and has been discussing the question of a necessary level of training for actors and methods of selection.

A smaller, but very active body, is the Variety Artists Federation.

V. SCHOOLS FOR PLAYERS AND AUDIENCE.

SO FAR the one persisting point which gives some unity to the picture is the extremely haphazard nature of everything that goes to make up the Theatre. By devious and incalculable ways people come together to put a play on, and they work hard to do the job to the best of their abilities, but that devoted activity, co-operative in the highest degree, seems diametrically opposed to everything else in the theatre-world. Here we touch on the basic issue with which the 1919 Conference grappled.

Dramatic Schools could do much to modify the situation. But do they? The leading school in Britain is RADA, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. It aims at training in dramatic literature and acting, and although there are courses in production, stage-management, radio-technique and teaching, the main object is to turn out players for the stage. The courses are full-time, with fees around 17 guineas a term and some 20 scholarships of varying values.

The training, on paper, is thorough, but there is no contact with the working theatre and no guarantee of graduating from the academy direct on to the stage—though the school does at times invite producers, managers and agents to attend performances given in the School Theatre. Some students try to get walking-on parts in London during the vacation or to play small parts in the provinces; and the school organises special programmes of plays for school-children in accordance with the educational examination syllabus. Yet good intentions are not enough without good links with the forces seeking to transform the theatre and link it more truly to life (and in this relation 'life' always includes the reviving of all most vital in tradition); and without this linkage we cannot hope, to put the matter mildly, to hear the last of the Kensington voice on the suffering English stage.

The Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art adds to stage-training full courses for those wishing to teach dramatic art and speech-training, with a special third-year course in speech-therapy. Fees are slightly lower than RADA's, and there are several scholarships.

Other full-time schools include the Webber-Douglas, which operates on a smaller scale but with an adventurous curriculum. Stress is laid on dancing and music—the latter being much used in speech-training and general work.

Then there are non-specialist schools which do not set out to train professional actors. They are run by Local Education Authorities, Literary Institutes, Technical Colleges, and organisations like the British Drama League. Many of the students at their courses are members of amateur groups, and the subjects include stage-training, dramatic literature, and history. Often the work is as good as it could be expected to be on a part-time basis.

Several Universities have a Chair of Drama, where the main attention is given to the history of the theatre and the teaching of dramatic art. A Diploma is granted (as at RADA and the Central School). But stage-training is ignored and all contact with the working theatre is shunned.

What then of the ordinary schools of the nation? what part do they play in preparing people for the enjoyment and understanding of the theatre? what use do they make of drama for its wide and varied educational possibilities?

Again one shakes one's head. In spite of many exciting but isolated experiments, there is no proper study of theatre or drama carried out in schools. The study of dramatic literature (i.e. Shakespeare) is a small part of 'Eng Lit.' and the production of plays in schools is sometimes encouraged—though too often only on the grounds that it teaches children to break down self-consciousness and build up a team-spirit. Participation in play-acting can have excellent social and personal effects on the players; but those effects will be produced most fully and lastingly when plays are not reduced

to a mild form of cricket and are enjoyed for their own peculiar powers of spiritual release and formative energisation:

With the exception of the lucky few who have lively imaginative teachers, children leave school bored with the inexplicable Shakespeare and completely ignorant of the theatre-tradition in Britain. There must be many like the young chap whom I encountered at an Army lecture, who thought that 'drama' referred to 'news' as written-up in *News of the World*. After all, most dramatic teachers get so little contact with the living theatre and are not in a position to relate history to contemporary theatrical development. The avant-garde of the profession, who realise how potently drama can be used throughout teaching to vivify subjects and to lead the child on to a vital participation and enjoyment of art, have as yet no solid following. And this despite the fact that Shakespeare's plays form the perfect basis for bringing English literature to life among school-children, and several schools (e.g. Raynes Park, Bristol Grammar, Harrow) get consistently remarkable results.

And so our educational system shows up as mostly wanting, whether we look at the specialised dramatic schools or at the more general field from which are to come the Audiences. It has been estimated that before 1939 some 75 per cent. of the population of Great Britain had never seen a live drama-performance; and the educational system is certainly to some extent both cause and effect of this gap between theatre and people.

Yet the materials are there. What is lacking is some common plan, some organic linkage, which would pull all the parts together. And so one tends to go round in the usual vicious-circle, seeing the impossibility of any sectional solution and at the same time unable to see where the unifying clue is to come from.

VI. PRICES AND LICENCES.

TO TAKE some of the sectional points. The theatre-industry doesn't help to make the theatre a mass-medium by the price it puts on the seats. In London the situation is fantastic. Omitting the anachronistic boxes (two to four guineas), meet prices ranging from 12/6d. to 3/6d. as a rule, with the majority of seats costing over 9/-. The cheaper seats, too, few, are soon booked up for a popular play, and the passer must either fork out much more than they intended, or spend a long time in a queue. The queuing may make a livelihood for the busker and the stool-attendant who reserves your place for sixpence ; but it also entails waste of time, cold feet, sore bottoms, colds and digestive troubles, and nobody can like it except the few lunatics who seem to treat first-night as marathon endurance-tests. To get into a London theatre at a possible price is often an arduous job for the people, and it is not surprising that so many prefer a spacious cinema with a much more comfortable seat for 4/6d. or even 2/-.

In the provinces theatre-prices are lower ; but they tend to remain proportionately higher than cinema-prices ; and though in Repertories an effort is made to keep prices down, the theatres are often cramped and poor in comparison with the cinemas. Prices for amateur shows are often very low ; but the shows are mostly given for specialised audiences and the cinema is not challenged.

Then, consider the accessibility of theatres. In London there are, say, four million potential play-goers, with forty odd theatres, mostly congregated in one area. Each theatre thus serves some hundred thousand patrons. The swollen and top-heavy condition of London makes it a special case ; yet in the large provincial towns, the position is much the same. The fall in population figures is wildly outpaced by

ll in the number of theatres. Liverpool has three ; Manchester, three ; Cardiff, two ; and so on.

smaller towns, such as Winchester, there is often no theatre at all. In rural areas it is exceptional to find a theatre more than 150 miles. Where theatres exist in small towns, they are mainly Repertory, as at Amersham. Sometimes the whole burden of providing theatrical entertainment falls on the local amateurs with their Little Theatre or their shows in school-hall or institute. In London the problem is how to get into a theatre ; in most of the country the problem is to get anywhere near a theatre at all. If there is a strong element of chance in becoming an actor, there seems almost as much chance involved in becoming an audience.

The Government was represented at the 1919 Conference by members of the Board of Education staff, invited because of proposals for the development of speech-training and dramatic art in schools. Progress in those subjects went on very slowly ; but though the Government did not show any haste to take up the educational opportunities, there have all along been some matters in which it has taken a strong interest in the theatre.

Every theatre must be licensed for public performance by the Lord Chamberlain within certain sections of London and the Home Counties, and by County Councils in other parts of the country. The Chamberlain charges ten shillings a month ; the County Councils, five shillings. The Councils also have the right of supervision over the buildings, particularly as regards fire-precautions—the lowering of the safety-curtain between stage and auditorium being enforceable by law. There are heavy penalties for giving public performances in unlicensed premises. Should this happen, the premises are classed as disorderly houses.

Under the Act of 1843, no public performance of any kind can be given on Sundays. In 1932 this was amended as regards cinemas and concert-halls, but not as regards theatres. Battle

has been raging for years round this question ; but the defenders of the 1843 position still hold their ground.

The Lord Chamberlain has complete control over all plays planned for public presentation. A copy of each new play must be submitted to his office, with a reading fee of two guineas ; and he is free to decide as he likes about the play, with no right of appeal against him. He may allow the play, or he may ban it altogether ; he may strike out one word or one scene or one act. The manager of the theatre at which the play is to be given is responsible for getting the licence, and will be liable if any emendations or additions are made to the play without prior submission to the Lord Chamberlain.

Plays are banned or cut about for moral or political reasons. Thus, a Phyllis Dixey strip-tease show was banned ; and so was Toller's *Pastor Hall*, an anti-fascist play which was made into a film after the outbreak of war in 1939 ; 1947 has seen the banning of *Tobacco Road*. The question of censorship is bound up with regulations covering Libel and Obscenity, Slander, Representations of living persons ; but the terms of reference given to the Lord Chamberlain are very wide indeed (the actual phrasing is ' preservation of good manners, decorum, or of the public peace '). This vagueness of terms, coupled with an absolute power against which there is no legal redress, is the sort of thing we would call a vile dictatorship if it existed anywhere else than in England ; but as it is in England we tend to ignore it with the facility of evasion which has made a less morally gifted Europe accuse us of Perfidy and Hypocrisy. The fact is that the whole antiquated system doesn't work sensibly even at its own level ; the Lord Chamberlain in his seclusion is hardly likely to know how any passage will come over on the stage. All he can look for are obviously indecent phrases and political ideas unpopular with the authorities.

Finally, the Government has its finger in the pie in the form of Entertainments Duty. Every ticket sold for any performance whatever over the price of threepence is liable to tax. As the

price of the ticket rises, so does the tax, until it is something like 40 per cent. of the more expensive seats. The manager is responsible for exact returns on seats sold, seats given away free, etc. For the smaller-type shows the tax is paid through stamps on tickets, which the manager buys from the authorities. Each stamp is torn through by the door-keeper, and one half is retained by Customs and Excise. Roughly, in budgeting for a production, thirty per cent. of estimated takings are written off against Entertainment Duty.

Exemption from Duty could be claimed up to 1943 on three grounds : that all the takings went to charity ; that the show was wholly educational ; or that it was partly educational or scientific in purpose and provided by a non-profit-making body. Every production had to be claimed-for separately ; and Excise Officers, better trained for detecting customs evasions, had to decide what was educational and what wasn't. Much argument about the fairness of decisions was provoked ; and commercial managements resented exemptions granted to municipal and amateur theatres.

VII. *FACTORS OF INTEGRATION.*

THE MAIN factors making up the British theatre in the years between the wars have now emerged, and the picture still holds true today for the dominant commercial stage. But against it we must set a number of counter-forces, integrative factors, which were at work between 1919 and 1939, and which took on renewed life and extended their forms during the war-years.

First, let us look back at the interwar years. The situation was in no ways static. The Conference in 1919 did not come out of thin air and go back to it. We belie the position if we reduce it merely to a chaos held together by a not-very-intelligent scheme of commercial rapacity. There were many persons and groups aware of the contradiction between a concretely co-operative art and anarchic commercialism, and who were trying to do something to overcome the contradiction. We must see in their work more than a series of isolated onslaughts or corner-achievements ; it was permeating the mass which resisted it.

Take the Old Vic and its splendid fight to revive something of true tradition. Until 1939 the name signified to most of us the old theatre in South London, near Waterloo Station, where we went to see Shakespeare. Its fame had reached all over the world as Shakespeare's London home. It ran a school for actors, producers and technicians ; it built a workshop attached to the theatre for set-building, property-making, and costume-devising. And it had a definite policy of audience-organisation and low-priced seats ; it managed to hold a local audience, families who had stayed true to the theatre since the days when it was a music-hall.

Though it did not own a permanent acting company, it tended to retain actors for quite long periods ; and the continuity of work was very valuable, especially for the young actors from the school.

The Old Vic was built up by the tireless efforts of Miss Lilian Bayliss, who drew more and more support round her from people concerned to see the stage a living force. After going through various forms, the administration stabilised itself as a Charitable Trust, with its Artistic Director taking an active part in running the programme. Thus it avoided the split between artistic intention and business aims, which rends the theatre at large. Things weren't always easy, but the Old Vic proved that the theatre could be run as a theatre and not merely as an alternative to stock-exchange gambling in the pursuit of huge dividends for a tiny group of people. A number of smaller enterprises showed many of the Old Vic's characteristics. The Arts Theatre created a cultural centre in Cambridge. The Embassy in Northwest London developed as a local Theatre, forming its own training school and seeking new talent among both actors and playwrights. The London Theatre Studio showed that a School could lay stress on practical applications and on the integration of all aspects of stage craft and technique. Just before the war it was working toward a full Theatre Company.

The Repertory Theatre Movement at the outset made a brave attempt to form clearings in the theatrical jungle. At the turn of the century influences from the European dramatic renaissance were growing stronger in Britain, and adventurous personalities in our Theatre were in particular watching the plays of Ibsen. J. T. Green's Independent Theatre staged *Ghosts* with success and opened the way to Shaw. The Stage Society with its productions helped to bring Granville-Barker forward and led to the famous Court Theatre seasons, where freshness and originality were the keynote for both plays and method of presentation.

The main gift of the Repertory Movement to our stage was to reinstate the Play as the most important single factor in theatre. The movement made possible the staging of the best European plays in England, and more important still, gave an impetus to new British playwrights. Shaw, Galsworthy,

St. John Hankin and Granville-Barker were all in effect products of the Repertory Movement, and at a later stage Manchester Repertory founded its own school of playwrights.

Repertory did not however receive a whole-hearted welcome. Its insistence on good plays, its serious approach to the problem of unifying acting, play, and production, ran sharply counter to the policy of the commercial stage, where the old system of actor-manager was giving way to that of finance-mogul building up star-glamour. In spite of the early achievement of the Vedrenne-Barker seasons at the Court, London failed to support a Repertory Theatre in the early 1920's, and continued to fail. In the provinces, however, there was still something of locally-rooted culture alive, which grasped at this chance of a new kind of theatre. But even here, the commercial interests had a solid grip on theatre-facilities, so that some new method of organisation and financial backing was needed.

So every Repertory Theatre, which has tried to carry on the ideals of the movement, has had to depend on the goodwill and depth-of-pocket of individuals and small groups—as witness the tale of the Reps in Manchester, Liverpool, York, Birmingham and elsewhere. In the early 1920's national or municipal support for the arts was not available, but carefully prepared schemes led in some cases to considerable civic support. A number of Repertories became established as part of community-life in various cities. But the struggle never ceased ; and there is no escaping the fact that financial worries have always been the frustrating factor in the growth of the Movement. The high aims of the early days had to be modified again and again. It is to the strong credit of the leading Repertories that though at times they have been forced to submit to box-office pressures they have never stopped fighting to raise the dramatic standard and re-educate the poisoned tastes of audiences. Among many of the lesser companies, however, the lowering of standards and the surrender to commercial managements (for exploitation in

FACTORS OF INTEGRATION

off-the-season gaps) have deprived them of the right to bear the name of the movement which they compromise

The Repertory scheme is of continental origin. In its European form the company has a number of plays in its repertoire, which it presents in alternating programme over a long period. (The clearest example we have in Britain is in Sadlers Wells Ballet). But this system has never had a chance to develop here, where financial stress has driven most companies into the weekly change of play.

And yet, though the high initial standards have been to some extent lost, the long fight against the commercial stereotype has been of immense value. The strength of the movement lies in the whole-hearted enthusiasm and theatrical seriousness of its members ; its weakness in the failure to link one theatre with another and develop a common front of defence against the close-knit organisation and ceaseless conditioning propaganda of the tycoons of the entertainment industry.

The Travelling Companies had many of the ideals of the Repertories, but they put the stress on penetration by movement. Their work takes them into virgin areas, where they play in village halls or on the green. They arrange productions for schools in rural districts as well as for city-schools. The achievement of the Stanford Holme and Basil Langdon Companies, the Pilgrim Players and the Osiris Repertory, among many others, is that they have stirred an interest in drama in areas ignored by the commercial theatre. Their resources have not been sufficient to sustain and satisfy, but that has not been their fault. Only an extreme devotion to drama could keep such pioneers going on their difficult paths. The Osiris Company undertakes all productions with a staff and cast of seven, travelling in caravans with their own bedding and cooking apparatus. The Travelling Companies, in addition to being adventurers into strange areas, have often been courageous in their choice of plays. They have no hesitation in taking poetic drama or the classics into villages where drama is totally unknown, and some of them, like the

Pilgrim Players, have given new plays of an experimental kind.

Here we find drama going back to the people with a vengeance, but the work is weakened by the almost ascetic dedication to small resources and the lack of a common front. Such groups have found the key to internal co-operative working, but they too often then continue in self-sufficient ardour.

The slow but steady raising of standards in various sections of the amateur movement, the very fact of the slow but steady consolidation of the movement, mean the growth of a powerful factor with potential elements of regeneration. And this is true even though so many sections are at the mercy of suggestions from the commercialised theatre. The Little Theatres have time and again taken over the work of the Repertories.

The record of, say, the People's Theatre, Newcastle, of the Maddermarket, or of the Highbury Players in experimental productions and the staging of new plays, is as good as that of any other theatre in the country ; probably better than that of any commercial theatre. Other Little Theatres, like the Unity Theatres, have attempted with varying success to train their own playwrights. A definite artistic method, a close connection with audiences, and a lively search for plays of merit : all these qualities are found in the best amateur groups.

Apart from the fact that amateur groups enable many thousands of people to share in the art of the theatre, they are a training ground for audiences, giving chances for the development of critical judgment and knowledge. They thus react on the professional theatre, since members and players of amateur societies are among its most loyal and appreciative audiences. And finally, they have proved that they can accept a form of organisation binding them into a national movement.

And with that we come back to the British Drama League, the organisation which called the 1919 Conference. It is often assumed today that the League is wholly concerned with

amateurs ; but a glance at *Twenty-five Years of the British Drama League*, published in 1944, would soon make the reader realise that it started out (in the words of Geoffrey Whitworth, founder and chief officer from its inception till 1947) 'to provide a focus of revival in all aspects of the art of the stage.' At the same time, it is true that the main section of consistent support for the League has throughout come from the amateurs.

Consequently, for better or for worse, the League's activities have been more and more concentrated in the amateur sphere. Festivals and competitions are organised locally and nationally ; considerable training facilities have been placed at the disposal of the amateur groups ; a magnificent library of plays and theatre-literature is available to members. In fact, all sorts of services are given to individual members or affiliated organisations for the fee of one guinea.

But the League has not severed its connection with the professional theatre. Its Council and Committees have always included people from every section of the theatrical world, professional and amateur, creative and administrative, educational specialists and mere audience. The League, both on its own and in collaboration with other organisations, in discussion with government departments, with educational institutions and professional groups, has probably done far more than any other single body to bring forward the facts and evoke the faith necessary for carrying-out the 1919 resolutions.

Close to the League has been the National Theatre Committee. Since the early 1920's, organised by individual initiative it has been struggling to establish a National Theatre. The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford cannot fully meet the need. In 1923 the Committee, working through the B.D.L., organised a competition for plans for a National Theatre ; and funds have been collected over the years. By 1939 a site in South Kensington was earmarked for the building.

A continuous campaign has gone on for the acceptance of the principle of a state-grant. But still no brick has been laid, and the Committee has never found agreement on what the constitution of such a theatre should be, how the theatre should be run and who should run it. Support has widened ; but it needs to widen yet further. The project of a National Theatre (a building) must be linked to the movement for a National Theatre (a national renaissance of the drama) if it is to fulfil a living purpose.

Here we are among potentialities rather than facts ; and must pause before we go on to a consideration of the war-years, when so many things which would have been dismissed as not even remotely possible blossomed out as larger-than-life realities

VIII. THE YEARS OF WAR.

ON THE declaration of war in September 1939 the government closed all theatres and places of entertainment as a security measure; many thousands of people were evacuated from the large vulnerable towns to reception areas deep in the country; the blackout smothered much of the leisure-time of the nation. The main source of entertainment, London, ceased to function. Many smaller provincial theatres closed because of the uncertainty as to what the air-raids might mean. Most amateur societies packed up, and everyone stayed at home or in the shelters to wait for the bombs. Even when restrictions were lifted after about ten days, only two theatres reopened in London, the Windmill leg-show in Piccadilly, and Unity Theatre, amateur Little Theatre, in St. Pancras.

During the blitz-period there was on the whole a revival of the first-class commercial theatre in the provinces; and after the blitz subsided, the London theatres reawoke. With gaps, the commercial theatre tried to carry on business as usual, with no change in type of play, method of production, or place of presentation.

But gradually a large number of new factors intervened, some of them new, some of them extensions of activities discussed in the last section. In January, 1940, Lord de la Warr, President of the Board of Education, realised that the long winter-evenings with no entertainment in unfamiliar surroundings would be a breeding-ground for depression among large numbers of people. So he persuaded the Pilgrim Trust to back a new sort of artistic organisation. A private committee was set up with the name of Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, CEMA.

CEMA's first aim was to provide musical entertainment for the evacuation centres, both those of family and those of industrial groups. It put itself behind Sir Walford Davies'

scheme of Musical Travellers. Within three months the demand had become so great that CEMA was recognised as 'a force in the life of the Nation,' and the Treasury doubled the grant made by the Pilgrim Trust. By 1942 the Treasury took over full financial responsibility.

In the early days, the dramatic activity of CEMA depended on the initiative of individual theatre-companies. The Pilgrim Players (of Canterbury under Martin Browne and of Oxford under Ruth Spalding), working at soldiers' rates of pay during the first months of the war, were the first to obtain financial aid. The sponsoring of drama was thus at first rather spasmodic, confined to single plays or limited seasons already projected by the companies. CEMA aid merely helped to extend a little what was already being done.

Other companies, such as the Market Theatre, soon came into the scheme, and were later joined by Repertory and Travelling Theatres, such as those of Stanford Holme, Basil Langton, and Walter Hudd. The methods of the Council changed to meet the new situation ; and though special tours were still supported, many companies were invited to work on a yearly basis with long-term planning. The conditions laid down by CEMA before granting association were that the management of the company should be non-profit-making and that all revenue above production and administrative costs should be put back into the enterprise ; and that the Council should have full access to balance-sheets and accounts, and the right to appoint an assessor to the company's management. In other respects the companies were left free to develop along their own particular lines. The result was a wide variety of plays and methods of production were made available to a continually enlarged public.

It is not surprising that the Old Vic played a key-part in the extension of CEMA's work. When the blitz hit London, the Old Vic evacuated to Burnley in Lancashire. From this centre it took its productions to a host of cotton-towns, large and small, in the north. These tours aroused so much enthu-

siasm that CEMA undertook to help the good work by guaranteeing the company against the inevitable losses incurred by taking full-scale productions to small theatres and halls. The Old Vic was thus the first front-rank theatre to come within the CEMA scheme ; and the whole method of CEMA's associated companies, working on a yearly basis, was drawn from the experience gained by the Old Vic in its Welsh and Northern tours. After this pioneering activity had proved itself, some commercial managements set up subsidiary non-profit-making companies to take advantage of association with CEMA.

In 1942 the experience of CEMA led to an important change in the method of allowing exemption from Entertainments Tax. The Customs and Excise office was instructed to base its decision on the bona-fides of the organisation applying for exemption rather than on the merits of each play considered in isolation. In practice this meant that Customs and Excise depended a great deal on the approval of their decision by CEMA, and CEMA became clearly responsible for ensuring that extra-profits made by companies benefiting from tax-exemption 'are expended in the public interest.' At the same time this principle was applied to companies operating outside CEMA control and marked a big advance in the application of government regulations to the changing theatre-world.

CEMA operated entirely outside normal theatre-channels, but its work opened up a lot of new opportunities for theatre-people. On the weak side, it gave new playwrights very few chances. The main emphasis was laid on the classics and a few established plays by living authors. The pioneering companies who had always been on the look-out for new plays were still left to present contemporary work. But a great number of new possibilities were offered to artists, technicians and producers. All these led a very busy life in the CEMA companies, paid for their often racketing work at rates on a comparatively low level ; and yet they mostly enjoyed it

and felt fresh horizons opening to their art. Productions were taken to all sorts of communities and groups, and every company had to keep on overcoming extreme difficulties; yet new ideas were continually tried out in production, acting and design. The government showed its appreciation by allowing actors to work off part of their National Service under CEMA.

The greatest achievement of CEMA, however, was the break-through to very wide sections of the people who had previously never known the theatre. Plays were taken regularly to out-of-the-way villages and towns, and to the residential hostels of the war-factories. On the whole the response of this new audience to the classics of drama was astonishingly fresh, keen, direct; they lacked inhibitions and felt themselves implicated in a way that has been lost by the frequenters of the commercial theatre.

CEMA stepped in to save one of Britain's oldest theatres, the fine Theatre Royal of Bristol, from being torn down and reconstructed as a warehouse. And through such productions as those of Tenants Plays Ltd. it affected even the situation in London.

Though continually having to work on *ad hoc* solutions, the Council kept in mind the problem of stabilising its huge but uneven growth and continuing to function into the peace. This optimistic attitude was important. It enabled the Council and its friends to bear down the opposition which in the face of the exciting wartime achievement clung to dim fears of 'government interference' in the arts. In fact, CEMA had boldly struck out new lines, of policy and shown beyond argument that an official centralising body need in no way be opposed to local activities, and that in fact without some such body the local activities could never become stabilised, could never successfully compete against the well-organised commercial theatre. A giant step towards a 'theatre policy adequate to the needs of the people' had been taken.

IX. MORE NEW FORMS AND FORCES

THE WAR brought into existence another entertainment organisation, ENSA (Entertainments National Service Association). ENSA was wholly financed out of public funds and formed part of NAAFI ; its concern (apart from some factory-work earlier in the war) was with the entertainment of the Forces. Employment under ENSA was counted as National Service, and many hundreds of artists were thus enabled to do their war-work in terms of the job for which they were trained.

Most ENSA shows were musical or variety. Unlike CEMA it under-estimated the intelligence of the common man ; and only later, by force of army-opinion, turned to the production of a few classics of drama. Experimental methods were hardly touched on, despite the difficult conditions of much of the work ; and the contemporary playwright got no look in. As a strictly wartime organisation, with no artistic policy, it was not concerned with long-term problems or the stabilisation of theatre-interests in the enormous new audience to which it had access. In retrospect, its main significance lies in the fact that the authorities felt impelled to organise some large-scale form of stage-entertainment for the Forces, in comparison with the very much smaller extent of such entertainment-work in the 1914-18 war.

However, within the services themselves there was a lively and considerable organisation of theatrical shows, ranging from rough but vital turns concocted by forces-personnel themselves, to attempts to stage the classics. But all this was done in such a piecemeal way that no overall picture can be built up. Still, inside the army, in the Army Education Corps, there did occur one development which had a lasting value.

The Army Bureau of Current Affairs, ABCA, under W. E. Williams, originated many new ways, often with a dramatising bent, of provoking discussion. Michael MacOwan, working

in ABCA, had the idea of a full dramatisation of discussion-subjects; and backed by Williams, he at last gained the establishment of the ABCA Play Unit. Under his brilliant control the Unit performed documentary plays dealing with current events, and travelled round all over the country, playing in garrison-theatres, canteens, nissen-huts, gun-sites. It was composed entirely of soldiers and ATS, and its highly-experimental plays aroused a ready response from the service-audiences.

One of the by-products of the project was the stimulation of J. B. Priestley into writing his *Desert Highway*, which dealt with the war in the Middle East and the attitudes of soldiers (including a Jewish sergeant) to the war in general. This play, produced by MacOwan, was toured by ABCA and Army Welfare. The Unit's own plays were written by a number of playwrights, including Jack Lindsay, Bridget Boland, Miles Tomalin, and Ted Willis. In them the collective method of work in composition was carried out to its limit, and the plays were in fact worked out rather on the lines used for film-scripts. The subject for treatment (e.g. Lend Lease) was argued out, facts collected, writers drawn in to discuss treatment and the visual ideas of the producer, scenes allotted, and the whole tried out on the actors, re-discussed and tried out, until the final script was passed. In this way many different styles were moulded into a single whole, with commentary, dialogue, and verse-declamation all playing their parts.

Scenery was cut to a minimum in view of transport difficulties and non-theatrical playing conditions—but also because the new type of play needed speed and concentration on essentials. Lighting was used boldly for dramatic effects, for mood, for punctuation, for pattern and variety. The actors were given the hard job of creating their own atmosphere (as well as carrying on their own props in the split-second of a blackout). And the result was a unity of theme and expression such as the theatre rarely achieves.

And this uncompromisingly experimental form reached out to the new audiences of the services, and made its business to do everything possible to break down the proscenium-barrier between play and spectator. For this purpose it used technical devices, speakers from the body of the hall, action among the audience, direct rhetoric, and surprise-effects.

Unfortunately the new methods devised by the ABCA Play Unit have not been carried fully into the stream of peacetime drama-developments ; but they have both affected the playwrights attitude to his medium (e.g. *Exercise Bowler* and Priestley's *Ever Since Paradise*) and have linked with somewhat similar trends in the Little Theatre movement. Thus, during the war, Theatre Workshop, under Joan Littlewood, worked in the North with a method seeking to unify documentary and poetic approaches, and has since produced such combinations of poetic imagery, stylised movement, and realistic dialogue, as *Uranium 235*. This group has the added distinction of an attached playwright, Ewan McColl, and has shown courage in tackling new audiences, e.g. in Butlin's holiday camps.

The war years saw another new force pushing into the theatre-arena when in 1942 the People's Entertainment Society was formed by the Co-operative Movement. For many years the Co-op, had been active all over the country in amateur drama through its Education Committees ; but PES aimed at the ownership of theatres by the movement, full scale production-management, touring, and the rest of things carried on by the big theatre-managements. The Society has in fact bought several properties, such as the Theatre Royal in Huddersfield and the Theatre and Cinema at Chatham, and has had a financial finger in the pie of several London productions. But for the rest it still mainly hangs fire.

A short touring season was organised by the Society's non-profit-making subsidiary, People's Plays Ltd.—the play being *The Rochdale Pioneers* by J. Grigson and the audiences various co-op. societies in southern England. Then after a

short season of commercial repertory, PES retired from direct production and has since contented itself with going into partnerships with commercial managements on a profit-sharing basis without any particular artistic concern for the type of play sponsored.

Towards the end of the war, however, it inaugurated an 'audience service,' PES arranged to transport parties of theatre-goers from districts round London, taking block-bookings at reduced prices and providing coach and refreshments. This service, aimed mainly at helping people to come up to see shows in which the Society is financially interested, has been mainly directed toward co-op. members.

PES, then, though not a negligible factor, has failed to justify the hopes of those who saw in it a potentially very powerful force capable of radically modifying the whole situation by bringing into play a genuinely popular policy.

X. EFFECTS ON REPERTORY AND AMATEURS.

THE REPERTORY THEATRES in many cases carried on with their work during the war and did their best to help on the new rising tide of interest in better-class drama ; and they worked in with the new civic plans for taking plays to the people, e.g. in Holidays at Home. But as usual the position remained very patchy and variable. The most important new development was organisational : the formation of CORT (Conference of Repertory Theatres). This body, as its name shows is loosely organised ; it attempts only to provide a platform for the exchange of ideas and experiences. Still, it marks the first decisive breakdown of isolation between at least the leading Repertories.

The Amateur Movement had, a heavy setback at the outbreak of war ; but when it recovered, it recovered on a new high-level. A tremendous increase in activities took place. The records of the B.D.L. show that membership, which reached nearly four thousand in the late thirties, dropped to some 2,500 during 1940, but from the next year started to climb rapidly and by 1943-4 reached the record total of 5000.

The National Drama Festival had been abandoned, but local Festivals were carried on with the aid of a CEMA grant to cover the adjudicators' professional expenses. Quickened by the war-situation, productions were more active than ever ; and one striking feature was the growth of the idea of Theatre Guilds.

For many years amateur groups in various localities had been combining to form Guilds, Associations or Federations, e.g. in Birmingham and Sheffield. The war-years saw the formation of such Guilds in the Thames Valley, Erith, and North London, and a co-ordination of certain activities was achieved in Bristol, Cardiff and other towns. The Guilds, varying their methods of work according to the needs of their

localities, have begun to weld the amateur movement into a strong section of community-life. Thus, all the societies in one area worked out a planned programme of productions, shared publicity, co-operated to share the expenses of special training-courses, and organised local festivals. Often too the Guilds have participated in the preparatory plans for reconstruction and community-centres in their boroughs, towns or counties. Wherever they have been founded, they have not only strengthened existing societies, but have also helped new groups to start work and have generally drawn larger sections of people into cultural activities.

In other ways too the amateur movement has played its part in reinforcing the new community-consciousness and its organisational forms. Thus, the Joint Committee for Drama was formed under the auspices of the National Council of Social Services. Its object was to co-ordinate and give voice to the extensive development of activities in so many of the voluntary organisations, the Women's Institutes, the National Association of Boys' and Girls' Clubs, the YWCA, the YMCA, and all the myriad Youth and Church Clubs. Indeed, there has been so much co-ordination going on, that there has been a danger of overlapping in some areas. Still, what matters is the very considerable increase in interest and action.

At the same time the Little Theatres were feeling the pressures of unification ; they reconstructed their Association on a national basis. The Unity Theatres all over the country formed a National Society. And the Co-operative Movement, through its Education Committees, organised a National Association of Drama Groups, with regional officers, and bought Stanford Hall, near Loughborough, as a centre.

The beautiful private theatre at the Hall has been put at the disposal of Co-op. drama-groups for festivals, conferences, and training-courses. Local and national organisation has thus been very considerably strengthened ; and in 1942 the B.D.L. turned its attention to the wider problems of the theatre and drew up the Civic Theatre Scheme. This detailed memo-

random put forward suggestions for state aided civic theatres, and was endorsed by British Actors Equity as well as by many distinguished individuals. It has been circulated to many Reconstruction Authorities for their consideration and embodying in rebuilding plans.

As a result of the increased activities among the people, the County Education Authorities have begun to appoint Music and Drama Advisers, whose work lies mainly in helping the development of youth and adult cultural organisations, and in seeing that they get the necessary facilities. In the early stages of such work County Authorities are able to call on the Carnegie Trust for aid in these appointments. The Advisers have very wide terms of reference. A certain priority is given to voluntary and community activities, but much interest is also taken in helping dramatic work in schools and other educational bodies.

The war years also produced a most remarkable White Paper from the government, a report on Community Centres. This publication gives a detailed survey of what our new and reconstructed towns will need in the way of central buildings where the varied interests and activities of the community may find an outlet. The conception is one of centralised finance and construction, with complete autonomy and the voluntary principle in administration, and altogether is a worthy summing-up of the lessons learnt by so many groups and communities during the difficult but stirring days of the war.

XI. THE ARTS COUNCIL.

IN 1945, soon after the end of the war, CEMA became a permanent organisation under the new name of the Arts Council of Great Britain, financed by and answerable to the Treasury. This event marks the first full acceptance by the State of responsibility towards the cultural life of our people.

The Council carried on with the established CEMA activities it continued to support its associated companies and to manage the Theatre Royal, Bristol. But it also went on to work out plans for a peacetime stabilisation of the revival of theatre. The first steps were taken in the field of Repertory.

A few areas were selected for experiment; Coventry and Salisbury. Each town was to house the H.Q. of a company which would tour the neighbouring towns as well as playing at home. Thus, at Salisbury the company was to play for one week at the Arts Theatre, and then spend three weeks in towns like Winchester and Southampton. During the tour the Arts Theatre would be available for concerts, lectures, amateur shows and festivals; and the company were to have a clear run of four weeks for their productions and rehearsals.

This type of plan was also adopted for Coventry, the West Riding and Kidderminster. Though not working out quite as envisaged, the scheme was successful at Salisbury, but less so at the other centres. One reason for the comparative failure was the Council's unclear policy as to the relation of sponsored work and local initiative. At Salisbury, a lively District Arts Society was on its toes all the while following-up the ideas of the Council and taking the major part in organising the use of the Theatre during the free weeks. There were no such active groups in the other areas.

The Arts Council depends a good deal on local initiative. The phrase often occurs in the reports: 'This tour may strengthen the local demand for a regional repertory theatre

and perhaps lay the foundation for such a development.' This is obviously an excellent principle on which to work : no venture can be stable without local roots and co-operation. Still, in dealing with a situation where so many roots have withered and have stayed withered for generations, sometimes work from outside is necessary. Thus the waiting on local formations is often a cause of delay and frustration. The Council works on the method of waiting till an organisation exists and is active before considering aid or grant.

Admittedly, the Council is limited to some £65,000 a year for its drama section, and must watch its expenditure with an eagle eye. But even so, a much more active policy would have been possible, though that would entail something more than a polite continual assurance to the commercial theatre that nobody would dare to think of trespassing on its god-given preserves.

These points are particularly true at the present moment, when the wartime impetus is still strong (though in many ways weakened) and the desire to turn our theatre from a big money metropolitan industry into a community institution still haunts many minds. Local initiative is of course needed all along the line ; but only a clear strong policy of support from the centre could mobilise and effectively direct the now scattered local resources and hopes. That the Arts Council should exist at its present level of action is of extreme importance ; but in the perspective of history it would probably be seen to have missed a magnificent chance on the years 1946-7 to collect and marshal the powerful forces available for a broad national plan of cultural reconstruction.

In estimating the difficulties, however, we must not forget that during this period many of the new audiences which had welcomed CEMA most eagerly were being dispersed. The hostels of the war-factories closed down ; canteen-concerts and plays for nightshift workers ceased to be the rule ; the communal groups of shelter and ARP post faded out. The problem of getting at the broad masses with the failure of the

community-centre idea to be properly incorporated in reconstruction, was certainly one to tax the greatest ingenuity.

If one turns to the commercial theatre, it is hard to find any strong signs of repentance and new-resolutions. The assault of the new cultural forces has in some ways even hardened the organisation of the rings and their stereotyping grip. There is the same stress on Stars and the same palpitating hope for the long, long run. In plays we may perhaps detect an increase in the percentage of American names.

On the other hand there have been breaches made in the defences, and the dogma that the populace wants tripe isn't so easily reeled-off. One important modification appears in the non-profit-making subsidiaries set up to work in with CEMA and Arts Council ; the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, has been used as a try-out theatre for plays which the strictly-commercial stage would be afraid to gamble on. This excellent idea is the one point where the CEMA idea has successfully reacted on the London stage ; but it is not enough in itself to affect the general position. However it does show the commercial theatre to some extent on the defensive, and suggests that a further strengthening of the forces behind the Arts Council might really begin to change the dominant types of play on the professional boards.

The results of war-experience however showed itself strongly in the Old Vic, both in a vitalisation of method and in forms of re-organisation. In 1944 the decision was taken to form a permanent company, and a very successful season was given at the New Theatre, London. A second company played at the re-opened Repertory Theatre in Liverpool, and a third company toured the country. All these activities were carried through in association with the Arts Council and the repertory included Shakespeare, Ibsen, Sophocles, Sheridan, Shaw and Chekov. Liverpool tried out contemporary plays, by O'Casey and Ustinov. In 1946 the Old Vic in London was giving its first contemporary play, by Priestley—a play which

previously, kept off the stage in London by the commercial ring, had had its premiere in Moscow.

A further development was the formation of the Young Vic, to give chances for young artists, with a programme for young audiences. Its stress was put on experiment and on training for the senior company. And finally, the Old Vic School was reformed ; a school directly attached to an active living theatre. It is naturally limited to a very small number of students, but it marks nevertheless a definite step towards the building of a real theatre : a theatre which works as a whole and not in the chaotic way of the commercial theatres.

1948 brought a new development in Bristol, when the Old Vic, established in the Theatre Royal, organised a production course for the theatre-companies of the West of England.

In the Repertory Movement, too, the Arts Council has helped to bring about important changes. The long-established Amersham Rep. now works closely with the revived Guildford Company ; the two groups plan their programmes so they can interchange and tour their productions. This arrangement extends the area of action and allows longer rehearsal and production time. Again, Oldham Rep., co-operates with the West Riding Theatre Companies.

XII. CHILDREN, CLUBS AND MAGAZINES.

AS PART of war-expansion there came some realisation of the special needs of children and young people. A movement for Children's theatres began. The first large-scale experiment was launched by Toynbee Hall, London. A full professional company was sent out all over the country playing under the auspices of Local Education Authorities and Youth Clubs. This company has now been taken over by a subsidiary of the Glyndebourne Trust and presents regular seasons.

The Young Vic, both in its choice of plays and by playing at convenient times and places, reaches out to young audiences. Smaller experiments have been tried by groups, e.g. at Leeds and St Marylebone, yet there is no national scheme for Children's Theatres.

There is however an increasing attention given to the place of the Theatre in Education. The matter is being busily discussed in the Ministry of Education, in many Universities and Schools and other educational organisations. A new magazine *Theatre in Education* has appeared and two Conferences have been already held by its editors, at which County Drama Advisers, representatives of the Young Vic and the Glyndebourne Children's Theatre, and teachers and organisers, all uniformly stressed the need to treat drama as an art, not simply as an extra piece of English Literature, as an activity in which young people should participate not only because it is nice to have a school play once a year, but also because the Theatre is an essential part of a full life, vitally rooted in our tradition and in the needs of our contemporary world.

The Glyndebourne group works, not with the Arts Council, but in close association with Education Authorities; while the West of England Theatre Company's Children's Section works with both Council and Authorities. Thus the problem

of strengthening organisation is being tackled from the angles of both local and national recognition. In addition, all the attempts to build up Children's theatres have concentrated on winning the support of amateur drama-groups and youth-clubs.

Shortly after the war's end the small club-theatre began to loom larger in the picture. The policy-statements issued by the Arts Theatre, London, and by smaller and newer groups such as the New Lindsay, the Gateway, Bolton's, and others, all stress points which run counter to the practice of the big commercial theatre. (The latter never issues any policy-statements.) Each club in its own way gives priority to teamwork and overall standards rather than to stars ; desires a good selection of new plays by new writers ; and invites the audience to participate by putting forward ideas and criticisms

The Arts Theatre holds a leading position through its long record of excellent productions and its consistency in building-up semi-permanent companies with as much new talent as possible. Some other clubs probably have emphasised more the need to present new English plays. Standards vary wildly on all aspects (plays, production, acting), yet these theatres are often very stimulating, because the people who run them take a serious attitude to their work. They have proved that new worthwhile plays are being written ; they do not merely ask for them, they produce them.

The Reunion Theatre and the Sunday Services Society, two clubs which have pooled their resources and plans, have taken on the task of helping the ex-service playwright, actor and technician to get their foothold again in the stage-world. Plays by ex-servicemen, when accepted, are performed by club-members at special Sunday-performances. At least four new plays have thus won their entry into the West End theatre, and many young actors and actresses have either won recognition or re-established themselves by these shows.

In the amateur theatre the co-operation in the localities has flourished. The B.D.L. is extending its Schools Department,

and in 1947 organised its first fulltime school for youth-leaders, teachers, and others, with the support of many Education Authorities. Many of the latter gave their employees time-off with pay to attend. The National Community Drama Festival has been revived, and the League has initiated a Festival of full-length plays : an event which marks the increase in serious dramatic interests among the amateurs—the slackening of grip of the facile and feeble one-acters which have done so much to keep amateur groups on a low level. The League is also undertaking, with the British Council's aid, the encouragement of international exchanges between the representative amateur societies of all countries.

The increase of serious interest is further shown by the new revived theatre-magazines which have come on to the market since 1945. Some are produced by single local organisations, like *Theatre* of the Bradford Civic, Highbury Little Theatre's occasional publications ; *New Theatre* launched by Unity Theatre, London. (This last however covers general theatre-matters and has a general sale.) *Drama*, the B.D.L. journal, covers the amateur field in detail, with articles and reports of general interest, though it mainly circulates within the League. *Theatre Today* (Saturn Press) carries articles of critical, technical and literary interest by persons of high reputation in the professional theatre ; and *Theatre News Letter* (Theatre News Service Ltd.) contains, besides articles and reviews, the most complete information to be found anywhere as to what is going on in the theatre.

These magazines together cover a great deal of the ground and help to make articulate the changes going on in the theatre-world. They fill out the gaps left by the old papers such as *Stage*, which might almost be called a trade-paper.

On the National Theatre front some high hopes are being raised. Within the general plan for the reconstruction of London, the scheme for turning the South Bank of the Thames into a green and pleasant place includes the building of a great theatre to carry on and develop the tradition nurtured

by the Old Vic. In fact, the Old Vic has gone right into the National Theatre Scheme. The new joint organisation is pressing ahead with its plan for a Theatre Building, and possesses, in the Old Vic, the nucleus of the future National Company. The whole idea is thus already given substance. Meanwhile, the system at Stratford has been reorganised, and under the direction of Sir Barry Jackson, the genius of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, there is some hope that it will beget a Festival quite breaking through the parochial bounds and reaching the status of, say, Salzburg. Established actors and producers such as Walter Hudd, Peter Brook, Beatrix Lehmann and Robert Harris have been attracted to work there by the new perspectives.

XIII. A NOTE ON SCOTLAND.

THIS SURVEY has almost entirely dealt with England. Important developments, however, have been going on in Scotland. At moments the movements in the English sphere have impinged on Scotland, as when the Old Vic during the war went to Glasgow and roundabout ; but on the whole the Scottish events have their own peculiar roots and background, and need to be considered in themselves, as part of a complex movement of social and cultural protest and revival.

In theatre, the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre blazed the trail for civic theatres in general by building up semi-permanent companies working with a producer on a long contract, presenting a varied repertory with many plays by home-authors, and laying much stress on audience-organisation. Its success (helped by CEMA and then the Arts Council) has enabled it to move from the Athenaeum to the larger Princes Theatre. This latter theatre, surprisingly, is situated in the 'popular' area of Glasgow, away from the 'best' residential parts.

Glasgow Unity, perhaps the liveliest of the many Glasgow amateur groups, has formed a professional company, and (with the Arts Council's aid) goes on tour through Scotland. Its special contribution lies in a very disciplined production and acting, and its effort to present new plays dealing with Scottish life. Perth and Dundee have well-supported Repertories, which go on frequent tours

The Scottish Community Drama Association, counterpart of the B.D.L. in England, worked hard at sustaining amateur activity during the war and in rebuilding groups since 1945.

Finally, to Scotland falls the honour of having organised the biggest Festival of Music and Drama that these islands have yet seen. This huge project, put into action during the autumn of 1947, was sponsored by practically every cultural,

educational and civic organisation in Scotland ; it had a programme national and international, classical and modern, professional and amateur. Its effect on the Scottish renaissance should be closely watched. The first impression it gives is that the Scots, with their strong cultural roots in their own folk, have got in before their brothers in England to tackle the problem of relating national and international developments.

XIV. LAST POINTS.

THE STORY has been one of patient, often apparently-unrewarded, effort between the wars, with a sudden crystallisation of forces on a new level during the war. The wavering lines came together in a new structure. The theatre expanded furiously and sometimes confusedly, and the people came in. Then came the peace, with its urgent reconstruction-problems, and much of the gains seemed to fall away. Still, certain lines of force reasserted themselves in the changed situation. Things have been irrevocably driven forward. The problem is how to clarify the situation and its needs in the most cogent way.

Lewis Mumford recently said that in many ways Britain led the world in ideas of Townplanning and reconstruction. The same might be said of the schemes for cultural reorganisation. The whole field of drama has been thoroughly covered, and plans of fine imaginative and realistic scope have been drawn up. The schemes for regional, municipal, civic theatres show deep and detailed understanding of what is at stake. Nor is it all on paper. Local Authorities have sought and gained powers to provide, manage and supervise the building and running of theatres; and some such theatres exist. Finally, 1948 has seen the addition of a clause to the Local Government Act, which empowers Local Authorities to raise up to a sixpenny rate for cultural purposes, specifically enabling them to finance orchestras or run civic theatres and cinemas.

But the carrying-out of these schemes in anything like fullness is bound up with the whole development of reconstruction, in particular with the rooting of the community-centre. Unfortunately the urgent need of housing has led to many point-to-point decisions, sometimes precipitated by commercial interests hostile to communal ideas, which have rushed ahead without the due relation of housing to civic and personal needs outside the house-walls.

A linked problem is that of theatre-space. In London and other large towns the ring-control is heavier than ever. Nothing short, it seems, of government control of rents can affect the situation. Sooner or later, the crushing burden of multiplied rents must be taken off the theatre's back. (In France, one management cannot control more than two theatres, and a theatre may not be let to anyone but a producing management.)

The strengthening of the Arts Council, and the clarification of its policy, is a key-matter, from whatever angle one approaches the problem of the theatre. Such strengthening and clarification could only come about by making the Council the co-ordinating centre for the integration of the various national theatre-schemes inside the general framework of reconstruction.

Equity has already shown the way to linking the organised bodies of the artists with the cultural needs of the theatre. And among the amateurs the further development of the Guild system and the linking-up of that system with the community-forms of reconstruction will supply another key-point of stabilisation in the national plan. Finally, the full working-out of the various tentative relations of drama to education will complete the needs of the situation and play an essential part in the building of an organic and liberated national culture.

The story told in this book, which began with the Conference of 1919, has been neatly rounded off by the Theatre Conference of 1948, over which J. B. Priestley presided. The main theatrical organisations sent delegates (except the Theatre Managers, who refused repeated invitations). The four-day discussion ranged over all the important aspects of the theatre, and ended with a public session at which the Chancellor of the Exchequer promised that all unanimous resolutions would receive very serious consideration by the Government.

Resolutions dealt with Civic Theatres, Drama in Education, the improvement and teaching under Local Education Authorities, revision of safety-regulations and more attention

to backstage conditions, aid for opera companies, the raising of standards in Musical Comedy and Variety. Unanimous support was given to a resolution asking the Government to expedite repair of theatres and conversion of other buildings (especially in theatrically desert areas). Another resolution, proposed with much precise information as to the big strides taken recently by monopoly-trends, called for a public authority to take charge of all theatre-buildings, control rents and see that the premises kept functioning as theatres. A reduction of taxation on the theatre was also demanded.

Dissent appeared on a few matters. One delegate voted against the call for wider representation on the Arts Council and its panels, a more active policy and a larger subsidy. Three hands were raised against the motion to abolish the censorship; and the principle of regulated entry, though gaining a majority, showed a considerable conflict of opinion. Six delegates voted against closer co-operation between amateurs and professionals.

The Conference ended by setting up a Standing Committee with the task of publicising the resolutions and convening a further Conference not later than 1950. Outstanding features throughout the discussions were the high level of information, the keen co-operative spirit, the strong desire to make the theatre a vital cultural force accessible to our whole people. The Conference marked a decisive step forward out of the confusions, cross-purposes, commercial monopolistic trends and anarchy, which have so long held up or limited originality and enterprise in the British Theatre.

THE END